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# THE ENGLISH JOURNAL

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VOLUME X

JANUARY 1921

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NUMBER I

## THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH\*

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On the occasion of the tenth annual convention the members of the Council meet to celebrate progress and plan for the future. The record covers a short period but one of intense activity. Nine years have witnessed far reaching changes in education and the establishment of new traditions with which all the workers in our field should be thoroughly familiar.

### THE BEGINNINGS

The National Council had its beginning in the midst of the storm and stress of the controversy over college entrance requirements and the freedom of the high school. At the Boston meeting of the National Education Association in July, 1910, a resolution was passed by those present at the English Round Table of the Secondary Department requesting the chairman of that department to appoint a committee on college entrance requirements in English and to instruct this committee to make protest to the College Entrance Examination Board with regard to the requirements that the Board had set up. These requirements were, as everyone knows, defined in the first instance by the so-called National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in

\*President's address, delivered before the Council, November 26, 1920.

English, but they were made the basis of an examination administered by the College Entrance Board. The resolution was moved by the late Theodore C. Mitchill, of New York City, who shared with his colleagues at that time the feeling of discontent aroused by the burden, not only of college entrance examinations, but also those imposed by the regents of the state of New York and other educational authorities.

The chairman of the English Round Table, Mr. Edwin L. Miller, of Detroit, saw fit to choose a chairman for the new committee from among his associates in the Middle West. He prevailed upon the present speaker to take up the work of the committee, with the understanding that a constructive study of the problems of high-school English was to be undertaken, not merely a protest to a college board; this after the full support of the National Education Association had been promised by its president, the late Mrs. Ella Flagg Young.

The committee was organized and sent out a questionnaire inviting opinions on the influence of the college entrance requirements and examinations as they were being administered. It soon became apparent that the English teachers of the country were eager for reform and were in need of a clearing-house to give unity to their activities. Hence, at the meeting of the English Round Table of the National Education Association at San Francisco in July, 1911, the following resolution was introduced:

*Resolved*, That the English Round Table of the National Education Association requests the Committee on College Entrance Requirements in English to organize a National Council of Teachers of English.

After a considerable discussion this resolution was passed. It was understood that the new organization, although independent, would work in sympathetic co-operation with the National Education Association.

In accordance with the resolution, the chairman of the Committee on English Requirements, after securing from state superintendents and other educational authorities a list of about four hundred leading English teachers in different parts of the United States, sent out the following notice:

THE CHICAGO TEACHERS COLLEGE  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, November 5, 1911

DEAR FELLOW-TEACHER:

The English Round Table of the National Education Association, at its recent meeting in San Francisco, passed a resolution, calling upon the Committee on College Entrance Requirements, which was appointed at Boston the year before, to organize a National Council of Teachers of English. The intention was to create a *representative* body, which could reflect and render effective the will of the various local associations and of individual teachers, and, by securing concert of action, greatly improve the conditions surrounding English work. In accordance with the resolution mentioned above, a meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, to be held in Chicago, December 1 and 2, 1911, is hereby called. Four sessions are arranged for, the first to begin at 10:00 o'clock, Friday, December 1, and the last ending at noon on Saturday. The time chosen, it will be noted, is the Thanksgiving recess.

The headquarters of the Council will be the Great Northern Hotel, corner of Jackson Boulevard and Dearborn Street. Reservations should be made at once. See schedule enclosed.

This invitation is being sent to leading teachers in each state. All associations of English teachers are urged to send representatives, one for each hundred members. No public announcement will be made. Will you, my fellow-worker, lend a hand? Please reply, saying that you will attend. Get your association to send delegates. Send the names of persons who ought to be invited. At least send a message to be read at the meeting. But come if possible.

Faithfully yours,

JAMES FLEMING HOSIC

*Chairman of the Committee*

## PROGRAM

FRIDAY, DECEMBER FIRST

10:00 A.M. in L 38

The Purpose of the Council. The chairman of the Round Table Committee Possibilities of the Work of the Council. PROFESSOR EDWIN LEWIS, Lewis Institute, Chicago, and others.

The Need of Improvement in the Conditions Surrounding the Teaching of Composition. PROFESSOR EDWIN M. HOPKINS, University of Kansas, chairman of a committee of investigation appointed by the Modern Language Association.

Discussion.

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER FIRST

1:30 P.M. in L 38

The English Course in the American High School.

1. A report of progress, by the chairman of the committee on college entrance requirements, appointed by the English Round Table of the National Education Association.
2. A New England View, by MR. CHARLES S. THOMAS, Newtonville, Massachusetts.
3. A New York View, by a speaker to be announced.
4. Some Impressions of an Itinerant, by MISS EMMA BRECK, Oakland, California.
5. A Plan of Organization of High School English, by MRS. HENRY HULST, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
6. Discussion.

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER FIRST

6:30 P.M. in the Chicago Room

Banquet. Plates, one dollar and fifty cents.

Address: Possibilities of Co-operation in Teaching, DOCTOR ELLA FLAGG YOUNG, Superintendent of Chicago Schools.

What Problems Should the Council First Attempt to Solve? A series of three-minute talks.

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER SECOND

9:00 A.M. in L 38

Business Session. Permanent organization of the Council.

The Educational Work of the Drama League of America, MRS. A. STARR BEST, President, Evanston, Illinois.

About fifty persons answered the call. These, together with those who sent messages by mail, were found to represent twenty-two states. A constitution was adopted, officers elected, and thus, in the small banquet-room of the Great Northern Hotel in Chicago, December 2, 1911, the National Council was founded.

The chairman of the first meeting, Professor Fred N. Scott, of the University of Michigan, was elected president for the ensuing year, and to his constant interest and wise counsel the success of the organization is largely due. Hardly less valuable were the services in those early days of Mr. John M. Clapp, always fertile in new ideas and always full of confidence in the future of the movement; Mrs. Cornelia Steketee Hulst, ready with words of

appreciation and encouragement; Miss Emma Breck, whose vision of the larger possibilities of the English course widened all horizons; Mr. E. H. K. McComb, full of practical good sense; Mr. Allan Abbot and Mr. B. A. Heydrick, who were never called upon in vain for definite contributions; and Professor Edwin M. Hopkins, who has kept his word that he would stay by this thing as long as there was any of it left. The list of loyal supporters of the Council is a long one. It is possible to name only a very small fraction of their number.

#### FEATURES

One of the earliest decisions with regard to the policy of the National Council was that it should have a relatively permanent home. The attendance on the part of Chicago teachers has never been noticeably large. The Council has retained its representative character. It has at the same time enjoyed something of the sense of stability which comes from having the same headquarters year after year. Meetings have been held, however, in both New York City and Boston, and it was voted by the Board of Directors at the Boston meeting that hereafter only two meetings out of three should be held in Chicago. In addition to the annual meetings held during the Thanksgiving recess the Council has regularly presented programs at the summer and winter meetings of the National Education Association. In this way not only has the Council brought its activities within the reach of English teachers who could not take the long journey to headquarters, but it has kept in close touch with administrators and supervisors, upon whom changes in educational procedure ultimately depend. Especially valuable have been the programs in connection with the Department of Superintendence in Philadelphia, Richmond, Cincinnati, Kansas City, Detroit, Chicago, and Cleveland.

Unlike most educational societies, which are conducted on the plan of the town meeting, the Council adopted corporation management. Its board of thirty directors, ten of whom were elected each year, was invested with the responsibility of electing officers and conducting the business of the association. The precedent was established that the members of the Board should represent

a wide range of distribution, both as regards geography and educational position. It was understood, also, that ordinarily directors were not eligible to re-election. In this way the Council attained to efficiency in its management and at the same time provided for the constant introduction of new blood. Recently, by placing the choice of the majority of the Board of Directors in the hands of its affiliated local associations, the Council has attained to genuine representative democracy.

Within a month after the first meeting of the Council the *English Journal* appeared. It was founded under the guidance of the late Newman Miller, of the University of Chicago Press, who took a most sympathetic interest in its success. As the organ of the National Council, it has reflected all the activities not only of the Council itself but of all its related organizations and has thus served as a genuine expression of public opinion in the field of English teaching. It has, moreover, been a stimulating force in the development of societies of English teachers in cities, states, and districts. More than fifty such organizations are flourishing at the present time.

No aspect of the work of the National Council has been more notable than the reports of its committees. More than a score of these have been from time to time appointed and the reports of several of them have been far reaching in their influences. Such, for example, are the reports on Labor and Cost of English Teaching, on Equipment for English Teaching, on Articulation of the Course in English in the Elementary Schools with the Course in English in the High Schools, on Home Reading, Grammatical Nomenclature, American Speech, Economy of Time in English Teaching, and the Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools. The last was issued as a bulletin by the Bureau of Education in 1917 and has been widely distributed. High-school courses of study in English in the various states and large cities are now commonly based upon it.

The report on Reorganization serves to illustrate the spirit of co-operation which the Council has sought to foster. Among the active committees of the National Education Association in 1911 was the Committee on the Articulation of School and College.

This committee was merged into a committee on the high-school course; and when the National Council of Teachers of English was asked to join forces with the Commission on the Reorganization of the High-School Course it gladly did so, and thus made possible a single unified effort on the part of all who were interested. Similarly, when the opportunity offered to combine with its activities those of certain committees of various public-speaking societies, the Council again responded. Thus it has sought always union and co-operation and avoided division.

#### THE PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED

The Council has an honorable history and has attained to a good reputation. It must, however, not rest upon its laurels. There is an abundance of work pressing to be done. There is, first of all, the problem of aims. What is English? Upon a clear and definite answer to that question depend the aims of English teaching, and hence the Council must find the answer. May I suggest, in the first place, that English means competence in the use of the vernacular for the purposes of everyday life? Those who know English can think clearly and effectively. They have learned how to use their minds. They read intelligently. This means not only understanding what the author meant to say, but also something of the value of it. In our democracy responsible thinking and adequate reading are indispensable. How else can the mass of news and opinion circulating among us be sifted and weighed? The "Undefended Gate," of which Professor Scott spoke so searchingly in November, 1913, is still undefended, and lets in intruders as dangerous as ever. He who is a master of English can, moreover, speak, not perhaps to a large audience, but at any rate to his companions and his neighbors. He can speak so that his meaning is unmistakable, so that it is received without undue effort, and so that it is conveyed agreeably. And finally, he can also write letters—perhaps now and then a brief article also—with the same qualities.

In the second place, he who has learned English has acquired a body of general information to which every American is entitled. He knows who has written books worth reading, something of



what many of the most important of these books are about, what magazines to select—he has, in short, the equipment necessary to enable him to make reasonably effective use of print and to share with his neighbors his experiences with writers old and new. This is a modest claim not intended to magnify the importance of Thackeray over Edison, or to assume that students in the high school or college are to become specialists in *belles-lettres*.

This suggests also that English should provide a means of pure and true enjoyment, not of artistic technique, but of the direct appeal of story, play, and verse. If a knowledge of technique be sought it will not be for its own sake, but as a means to a larger end, namely, to arrive at the author's meaning or perhaps to judge the value of his contribution.

Not least in importance is the thought that English means also a source of ideas and ideals. It is what an author says, not primarily how he says it, that appeals to the ordinary reader, even the ordinary student in high school or college. It is, of course, essential that ideas should be given an appealing form. They should come to the reader with force, but speaking generally, it is the ideas and not their form which make the book worth while.

Too generally has this been underemphasized in school and college teaching. Time has been wasted on technique which should have been devoted to assimilation. Now especially that the democratic ideal as cherished in America is coming to be recognized more and more the world around as the true ideal of social life and as we find ourselves face to face with the necessity of developing this ideal in thousands of our own people who do not fully grasp it, the opportunity of the English teacher looms large as never before. He finds himself dealing with precisely those embodiments of the American ideal which are its finest and truest expression. In his hands, rather than in any others, may be said to lie the responsibility for forming the concept of Americanism in the youth of our time.

This suggests a new emphasis in the materials of instruction. American authors will be chosen, not merely because they are more interesting and perhaps in spite of the fact that in some cases they are less effectively written than others, but *because they are*

*American. Belles-lettres*, too, will perhaps occupy a relatively small place to make way for stirring biography and accounts of real achievement. The question, too, of whether a book is new or old will seem insignificant as compared to the question, What power has it to stimulate the circulation of true ideas?

Most pressing is the question of where the trained teacher is to come from. The high-school principal and the college department head tell us that never before was it so difficult to find the right person. At the very moment when we should be rapidly developing a method truly democratic in its principles, we find ourselves depending upon the help of many who are not capable of formulating any consistent method at all. Yet we must cling to the hope that teaching will more and more become a profession, a career, and we must meet the present emergency by developing a more effective supervision. If this supervision be animated by that broad-minded conception of social relationships which we commonly call democracy, if teachers are educated by responsibility, there is hope that they too will learn how to train their pupils through responsibility. The full, complete, purposeful experience is alone the worthy educative agency. Teachers and pupils must participate, they must think out and formulate purposes, lay out plans, and judge results, as well as carry on. Nowhere is there a greater opportunity than in English teaching to demonstrate that the *actual experience* of the classroom constitutes at once the course and the subject. Method, method of teaching and method of learning, is the essence of the process.

#### A WORKING PROGRAM

Probably no two members of the Council would formulate our working program in the same terms. Permit me, however, to close with some suggestions under that head. First the Council should play its part in popular movements for the improvement of education. It should interest parents in the betterment of the conditions which surround our work. It should urge its members to join with the National Education Association and other bodies in the movement for better salaries and the dignifying of the career of teacher. In the second place, it should continue its

work of defining the aims and essentials of English in the different stages of the educational scheme. In the junior high school provision must be made for individual differences. In the senior high school and in the junior college that background of culture and competence in the use of the vernacular which has been described should be insured. It is especially important that the smaller high school, obliged to work with more limited facilities and with less supervision, should be particularly borne in mind. The Council should, moreover, lend a sympathetic hand to the development of the program for the younger children wherever this is possible and it should join with the more progressive who wish to see a better definition of the types of scholarly investigation which are worth while in the field of English study and in the field of education. It should itself increasingly engage in such investigation, supplanting mere opinion with facts painstakingly ascertained. It should aid in establishing a distinction between courses that are for the ordinary citizen, for those who are going to make teaching a profession, and for those who hope to spend their lives in scholarly research. Finally, it should spare no effort looking to the improvement of English teaching as a profession. We are nearing the end of the period in which we must face unusual conditions produced by the Great War. Already we hear of unemployment. We may expect that soon the agencies for the teaching of teachers will find their resources taxed. What sort of person shall they train? What kind of ability shall be attracted into our ranks? The answer to this question depends partly upon ourselves. It is our mission to attract to teaching as a career the most promising young men and young women now in our high schools and colleges. It is ours, also, to help to guide them in the choice of their courses and to idealize their life-work. They must come to believe, with Professor Palmer, that teaching is truly a profession and not a trade, that it rightly requires a long period of rigorous preparation, that it seeks to maintain high standards, and that it is willing to give an unmeasured service.